
Louis-Philippe Gagne as Mayor

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Lewiston Sun Journal

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Shop owner is giving nostalgic stamps away

By BARBARA PROKO
Sun-Journal Staff Writer

LEWISTON — "Come to Lewiston, the Industrial Heart of Maine," the decorative stamps proclaim.

The late Louis Philippe Gagne had the stamps printed during his tenure as mayor in 1947-1948. Along with similarly themed posters and pins, thousands of them were distributed in an effort to promote the city.

A cache of several hundred thousand more recently came to light, and are now available at Reflections, a Bates Street second-hand shop.

Store owner Marty Tuttle is giving the stamps away free to anyone interested in carrying out Gagne's original intent: to promote Lewiston.

"They'd be great to stick on cards and letters," Tuttle suggested last week.

The 1-inch by 1½-inch stamps come in a rainbow of colors — orange, red, purple, blue and green. The hues appear remarkably vivid, considering the fact that the stamps have been bundled and stored in a basement for nearly a half century.

The design displays a map of Maine. Arrows point toward the heart that marks Lewiston's location, and the message beckoning visitors stands in simple block letters.

As 1940-ish as Andy Hardy movies, the vintage stamps would certainly appeal to nostalgia buffs.

"They've got a little bit of age to them, that makes them kind of special," Tuttle remarked.

The stamps blend in well at Reflections, a tiny shop filled with old jewelry, curios and home furnishings, and Tuttle plans to set up a special case to show them off.

When he displayed a few sheets of the stamps in his storefront window, they attracted considerable attention from elderly residents of the nearby Intown Manor.

"I'd bet my life at least 20 people stopped by to comment on the stamps and tell me this or that about the (late) mayor," Tuttle said.

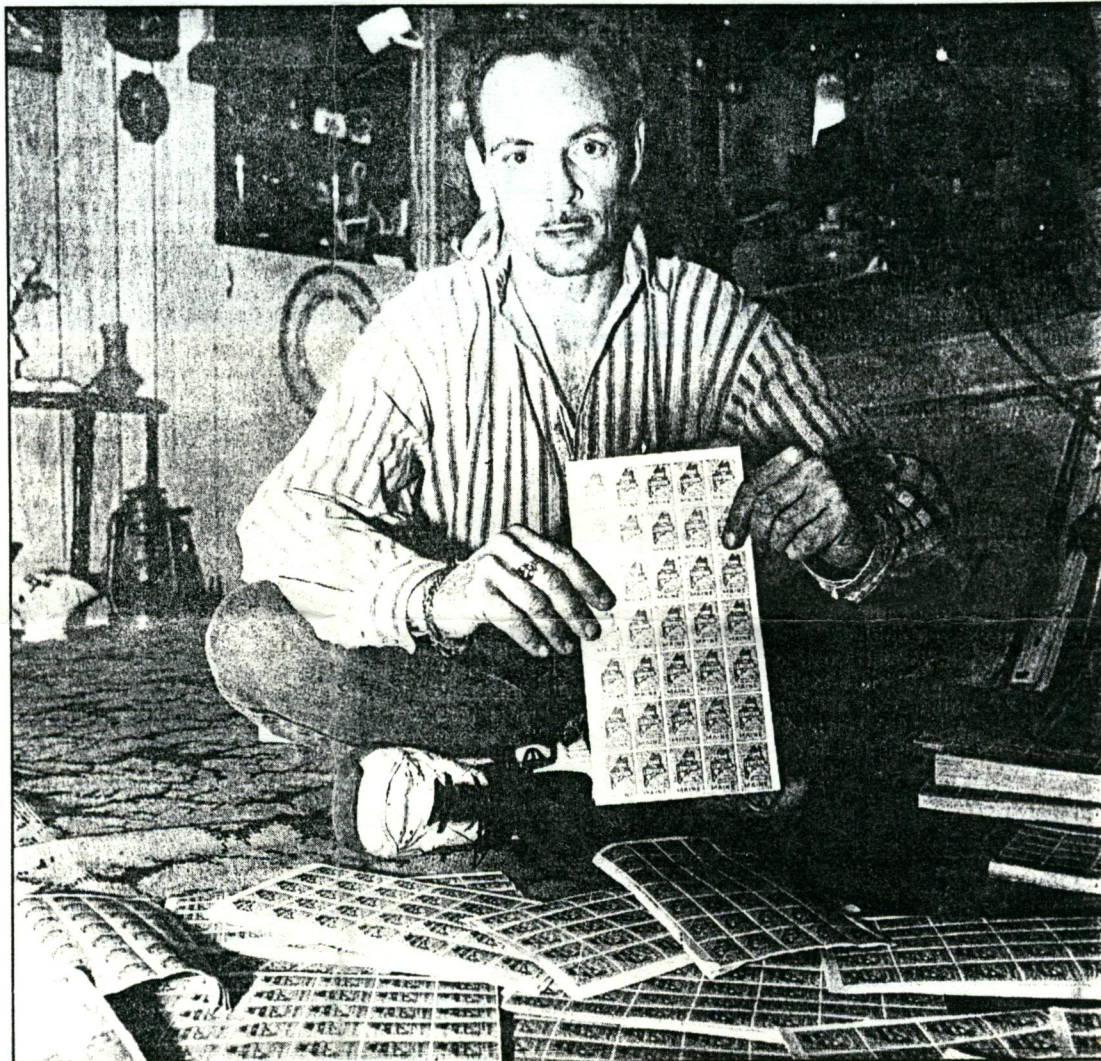
Although Gagne (1900-1964) occupied the mayor's office for only two years, his political career spanned more than two decades and his interest in Lewiston was lifelong.

Moving here from Quebec in 1922, Gagne worked in the editorial department of Le Messager Publishing Co. He served as a ward clerk in 1928, then held seats on the school and Selective Service boards and the City Council.

The two-term mayor was "vitally concerned with the French Canadian societies," according to the Geneva Kirk and Gridley Barrows book "Historic Lewiston: Its Government."

The authors attribute Gagne with founding Le Montagnard Snowshoe Club and the Vigilants, a sort of local government watchdog group; serving as first president of the American Snowshoe Union; and holding membership in Societe d'Assumption, Union St. Jean Baptiste, Association Canada-Americaine and the Musical Literary Club.

Coincidentally, it is Le Montagnard that owns the Ritz Theater — property that was in its heyday in the '40s and is now in the limelight of downtown revitalization as the



KEN LOVE/Sun-Journal

Marty Tuttle, owner of Reflections, a Bates Street second-hand shop in Lewiston, is giving away the stamps shown above to anyone interested in promoting Lewiston or for those interested in a touch of nostalgia. "Come to Lewiston, the Industrial Heart of Maine,"

home of LA Public Theater.

Also coincidentally, Tuttle recently rented a second storefront near the Maple Street theater, and plans to open a used furniture shop there soon.

Tuttle sees a common thread in all this: A sense of optimism about Lewiston, which Gagne fostered, burned brightly almost 50 years ago. It has been rekindled, and

stamps were printed while the late Louis Philippe Gagne was mayor in 1947-1948. The stamps, as well as posters and pins, were distributed in an effort to promote the city.

the effects are evident both in the city's landscape and its citizens.

"Back in the '40s, people had a sense of belief" in Lewiston, Tuttle said.

"I feel anyone who's trying to do anything in Lewiston, hey — give them credit. I think Lewiston has a lot of potential."